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C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 01 OF 02 MUSCAT 002189

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STATE FOR NEA, NEA/ARPI, NEA/I, NEA/RA

E.O. 12958: DECL: 12/17/2014

TAGS: [PREL](#) [PGOV](#) [PTER](#) [MOPS](#) [OPDC](#) [ETRD](#) [MU](#)

SUBJECT: OMAN FONMIN ON SECRETARY'S ORAL MESSAGE

REF: A. SECSTATE 264697

[1](#)B. MANAMA 1885

[1](#)C. MUSCAT 2177

Classified By: Ambassador Richard L. Baltimore III.

Reason: 1.4 (b, d).

Summary

[1](#)1. (C) Visiting NEA DAS Dibble reviewed themes in the Secretary's oral message with Omani Foreign Minister Bin

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Alawi. Concerning Iran's behavior, the Minister recommended finding ways to address Tehran's security concerns and feelings of isolation as an effective means of reducing its possible nuclear ambitions. Encouraging Iranian WTO accession could also produce reform momentum. Bin Alawi reiterated Oman's full support for Iraq and readiness to receive any visiting officials, but he gave no firm indication of when its reconstruction pledge might be fulfilled. The Minister hailed BMENA as contributing to regional reform despite some lingering differences among the various states. He underscored Oman's desire for a Free Trade Agreement as an essential ingredient in expanding the Sultanate's economy. End summary.

[1](#)2. (SBU) On December 12, visiting NEA DAS Philo Dibble, accompanied by the Ambassador and Pol/E Chief (notetaker), reviewed the substance of ref A oral message from the Secretary with Minister Responsible for Foreign Affairs Yusuf

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bin Alawi (YBA). Discussion of Oman's support for the Palestinian Authority and Middle East peace was reported in ref C.

Iran

[1](#)3. (C) DAS Dibble reviewed U.S. policy views and concerns about Iran. Echoing his December 5 remarks to DNSA Hadley in Manama (ref B), YBA observed that it was difficult to talk to Iran about its nuclear ambitions because Tehran flatly refuses to acknowledge any. But he feels the political and military pressures on Iran, particularly as it is now virtually surrounded by U.S. forces and abuts nuclear-armed Pakistan, drives its desire for due respect from the international community. Noting that Iran's nuclear power industry traces its roots to the Shah's regime, the Minister argued that Tehran's isolation forces it to resort to dealing with nations like Russia and North Korea. Easing the international pressure and finding a way to reassure Tehran of its security, he believes, would reduce any incentive Tehran might have to pursue nuclear weapons.

[1](#)4. (C) The Minister believes the USG needs to make a choice on the end-game for Iran and how to bring it about. Washington can rely on either pressure or "process." Given recent and ongoing conflicts in the region, YBA was adamant in saying further military strife is not welcome. The only real choice therefore is resorting to process, i.e. the peaceful transformation of Iran's government. With 65 percent of Iran's population comprised of young people hungry for change, promoting Iran's accession to WTO could be just the device to harness their support and undermine the foundations of the conservative ruling class. Such an indirect tactic is particularly apt given the certainty of a political conservative winning the presidential election in [1](#)2005.

Iraq

[1](#)5. (C) YBA reiterated Oman's policy of giving Iraq "all possible support," saying that he stands ready to receive any visiting Iraqi officials, be it FM Zebari, President Yawwar, or others. On the question of disbursing Oman's USD 5 million pledge to Iraq's reconstruction, Bin Alawi excused Muscat's inaction thus far by complaining that it receives

numerous ad hoc requests from various Iraqi ministers. Oman wants to keep any contributions "above board," and seeks reassurance that any donation will be properly coordinated.

16. (C) DAS Dibble underscored the USG's concern over Al-Jazeera's out-moded and unhelpful coverage of the conflict in Iraq. YBA expressed confidence that the problem will be settled as Iraq becomes increasingly stable. He agreed that Al-Jazeera has "crossed red lines" in its reporting, and that the phenomenon has spread to numerous other satellite channels. He cautioned the U.S. to be tactful in how it addresses its concerns to Qatar, which he believes will be willing to engage in discussion but will not respond productively to outright accusations. Should talks fail to resolve the matter, YBA conspiratorially suggested using technical means to interfere with Al-Jazeera's satellite links.

Political and Economic Reform

17. (C) Reiterating his preference for the word "modernization" over "reform," the Minister hailed the BMENA initiative as worthy progress, despite some differences of view within the region. Even within the GCC, he noted, there is a considerable divergence in states' willingness to embrace change. The USG's commitment not to impose reform from abroad has not sunk in with everyone, but YBA was optimistic that the ultimate goals were widely shared despite differences in pace.

18. (C) On linking reform to Middle East peace, YBA shrewdly noted that the Arab "man in the street" is far more concerned with local bread and butter issues than Palestine, but that the political elites will resort to linkage because, unlike the choice to pursue real change, they cannot be held accountable for what happens in the peace negotiations. The governments choosing that crass ploy made themselves clear in Rabat. YBA opined that Saudi FM Saud al-Faisal does not personally believe in the statements he was forced to deliver in Rabat, but that his speech was reflective of the fact that Saudi society perhaps is still not yet ready to undertake the needed reforms.

19. (C) As for the Forum for the Future, YBA thought the first meeting in New York made it obvious that the business community had clear notions for a course of action, but that the civil society groups were far more vague. He feels that addressing political issues will nevertheless make it easier to progress in the other areas. Looking at Oman, the Minister said the country is open and has accorded women full rights. The economy needs considerably more development, however, particularly in order to create more jobs for both sexes. Oman's enthusiasm for Free Trade Agreement negotiations with the U.S. is driven by that need to develop further the macro-economy. YBA was adamant that Saudi opposition to the Bahrain-U.S. FTA would not dissuade any of the five other GCC members from going forward with the accords on a bilateral basis.

110. DAS Dibble did not clear this cable.
BALTIMORE